**World Heritage status for Varanasi from UNESCO**

*38. SHRI HARISH RAWAT:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to seek World Heritage status for Varanasi from UNESCO;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) if so, what are the requirements for such status;

(d) whether Government are aware of the poor maintenance of the old ghats of Varanasi;

(e) if so, what steps are being taken to remove encroachments of the ghats by commercial shops; and

(f) whether Government propose to seek to remove such encroachments urgently?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (f) There is no proposal at present to seek World Heritage Site status for Varanasi as the site is not included in the tentative list. World Heritage status is accorded to sites which fulfill the criteria of outstanding universal value as laid down by the World Heritage Committee, after evaluation of the nominations forwarded by the State Parties.

The ghats at Varanasi are not protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. The old ghats at Varanasi are being maintained by the Varanasi Municipal Corporation. The local municipal body undertake regular lighting, cleaning desilting of the ghats. For the renovation projects of the ghats, funds are provided by both the Central and State Governments. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India sanctioned 4.64 crores for beautification and 270 meter extension of Assi Ghat and another 7.86 crores has been sanctioned for revitalization of Varanasi as a special tourist destination in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The project includes improvement and development of lanes, kunds and Wetland, Public conveniences etc.

Following the Government and Court orders, encroachments are removed by adopting the due process of law.